

Building an Effective Church Music in Nigeria: The Role of a Music Director

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Abstract

Review Article

Music performance has always been an area to determine the standard or efficiency of the church in worship. Since political independence in Nigeria many changes have been witnessed in our churches. The number and size of churches in Nigeria have grown phenomenally. The music heard during church services has moved from almost exclusive of Western hymn to an ever-widening use of indigenous and scripture based choruses, indigenous choral anthems, and 20th century hymn and gospel songs. Since the evolution of new generation churches in Nigeria there is need for more music directors or choir master as the case may be. Today, so many appointed Music Director of some of our churches in Nigeria have little or no attributes of good music leadership and musicianship, and all that it entails to handle the position effectively for the growth and development of church music. This paper therefore, reviews church music as mind elevating medium of worship, the music director/qualities and the differences between church music and liturgical music in Nigeria.

Keywords: Effective Church, Music in Nigeria, Music director.

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INTRODUCTION

Church Music is music written for performance in church, or any musical setting of ecclesiastical liturgy, or words set to music expressing propositions of a sacred nature, such as a hymn.

Martin Luther, the Augustinian monks and others who championed the 16th century reformation in the Roman Catholic Church, also stressed the importance of music. To them, Hence Jacob [1] stated that “next to the word of God only music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governor of human feeling” (p.70).

This reformation also occasioned a musical reformation or revolution as well in Germany. This saw in its way, the birth of the German Chorale and antecedent of the homophonic arrangement otherwise referred to as hymns. Apart from ensuring that music is taught in all schools within his jurisdiction, in the same way the Greek of old made the study of music one of the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy). Which was a prerequisite to the study of theology; Luther made the knowledge of music a prerequisite to ordination of the ministers.

Calvin and Filippo Neri who followed after Luther's secession, stressed the importance of singing

in the church. This resulted in hymns with texts inspired as it were, by the Holy Scriptures, and the Laudi.

Before the year 1800, the comments about music were primarily about Vocal music (instrumental were seen as derived from vocal music, but that changed around early 1900). Another remarkable point is that until 1800 there was no difference between secular music and church (spiritual) music. Until the 18th century, music in the world was typical Church Music.

Music is for all the church. As such the congregation, whether member's or participants need to be considered when building an effective Music Ministry.

The concept of Building an Effective Church Music Ministry is still become a reality in many churches in Nigeria because members of the congregation are not fully informed or guided towards their response and contributions towards the musical performance in the church. Therefore, the Music Director has to sensitize the church priest, congregation, the choir, and all other arms in the church for effective growth and development of the church.

Problem Statement

- Many Church music directors are not trained
- Many Church music directors lack church sponsorship
- Many Church music directors do not possess some musicianship qualities and non-musicianship quality

What it means to be effective

To be effective can be simply said to be useful. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, also simplify "Effective" as being "Successful". In other words, Building an Effective Church Music is as good as saying Building a Successful Church Music.

Church Music

Church music is a Christian music, it is a music written for performance in Church, or any musical setting of Ecclesiastical Liturgy, or music set to words expressing propositions of a sacred nature, such as a hymn. Church music in Nigeria could be traditional or Western kind of music which involves group of singing.

Today in Nigeria, church music is grouped into two (2)

- Classical Music
- Contemporary Church Music/ Pentecostal Music

Classical Music

So many Nigerian, especially the non-academic musician sees classical music as kind of western culture music and in most cases it is refers to as a serious music because of its standard in performance both in instrumental and vocal performances. Also, some refer classical music to the music of the Orthodox Christian Faith, such as:

- Catholic Faith
- Anglican Faith
- Methodist Faith
- Baptist Faith
- Presbyterian Faith, etc.

To academics, classical music is music of a particular period in music history. The period which lasted between the years (1750-1820) AD. The concept of "Classical" in music conforms to the ideals of the Greek and Roman models. These models are characterized by:

- Objectivity
- Emotional Restrain
- Clarity of form
- Conforming to certain structural principles.

Ekwueme [3]. Said "*Classical ideals in music are not confined only to this period (1750-1820) AD. They cut across all periods. They denote music that has*

stood the test of time, e.g music that is enduring irrespective of the age or time the music was composed".

In a nut shell, classical music could be said to be academics music that is always appreciated irrespective of the period it was composed.

Contemporary/ Pentecostal Music

The word "Contemporary" and "Pentecostal" are often used interchangeable in Nigeria, because of its functions in the worship. Nigerian contemporary music could either be "Sacred" or "Secular". This paper focus on sacred aspect of contemporary music.

Contemporary music is a loosed defined genre of Christian music used in contemporary worship. Parret [2] said "Contemporary music has developed over the past sixty years and is stylistically similar to pop music. (pg.11). The songs (Contemporary music) are frequently referred to as "Praise song" or "Worship song", with either a guitarist or pianist leading. This can be found in Pentecostal churches such as:

- Winners Chapel
- Redeemed Christian Church of God
- Dominion city, etc.

Another word for Pentecostal music is "Gospel Music". Ekwueme [2] wrote "*Gospel music is a style of religious singing popular among African and Americans and other black people worldwide. It is largely used by Evangelical churches for worship, praises, revivals, deliverance services and concerts. (pg 115).*

In Nigerian, praise music as popularly known as Contemporary / Pentecostal music has already gain its shape in the system of worship. Modern churches encourage their youth, finance them; train them in praise music in other to improve their versatility in performance. Most known Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are flooded by youth because of the nature which is of free style unlike that of serious music that is mostly performed by the orthodox churches.

Also, the time constrain in preparing the praise team is nowhere to be compare with that of Orthodox churches choir. A three to four days of rehearsal is enough to prepare a praise team but months can be used to prepare some to get a choir ready for performance and this is where many Nigerian youth are not so much interested classical / orthodox music, rather they prefer a musical performance that wouldn't take more than three to four day rehearsal before its performance.

Who is a Music Director?

The term Music Director is used to show the musician who is in charge of and responsible for the training of the choral group, and for conducting such a group at rehearsals and performances. In some other

country like the Britain “Music Director” is often referred to as “Choral Conductor”. However, the term “conductor”, while being synonymous with “director”, may be applied only when the musician is also actually responsible for conducting the choir, that is, for standing in front of the group and beating time at a performance. He may not necessarily be regarded as a “conductor” if his responsibility stops at preparing the choir, through training, and for a performance.

Churches and many musicians who have been brought up through the church are more accustomed to the term Choirmaster, referring to the master of choral music at the church. He may also be the organist, but does not necessarily, except on rare occasion, get involved with actually *conducting* the group. The church choir most often performs without anybody standing in the front of the group to beat out time in the form of conducting.

Musical Qualities of a Music Director

A good choir trainer and choral director must possess a number of indispensable qualities, some of which are musical, some of which are none/extra-musical. It is probably impossible to list all the musical qualities required to make a master choral director and choir trainer. Some of the most essential and indeed indispensable qualities necessary for the successful undertaking of the assignment are discussed below:

- A Good Hear
- Relative pitch
- General musicianship
- Knowledge of Choral Literature
- Music Theory
- Knowledge of Choral Theory
- Singing Techniques
- Acoustic and Vocal Orchestration
- Keyboard Facility
- Orchestral Conducting
- Musical and Aesthetic Standard

None / Extra-Musical Qualities of a Music Director

There are many points outside musicianship which make the effective choral director. Perhaps the most important is discipline. A choir trainer who hopes to be successful must have self-discipline, details of some aspects of which are outlined below.

- Regularity in Attendance (Punctuality)
- Self –Control
- Hard Work and Mental Alertness
- Clarity of Instruction
- Friendly Attitude
- Sense of Humour
- General Education

The Role of Churches in the Development of Music Director

It is true that to build an effective church music, the role of music director cannot be over

emphasized. Yet the Church also needs to know what to do in other to make the church music effective.

• Prayer

The first thing required from the church to choir is Prayer. No choir or church music group can be effective or succeed without prayer. Therefore the chorister’s prayer alone is not enough, the church still need to support them with prayer. There are so many evil acts that is said to be attached to musician, either the sacred or the secular, such as Pride, love of money, drunkenness, fornication, etc. This is some of the stress prayer points for choir/ music group in our churches.

• Upgrade the Knowledge of the Music Director

It was observed that many of the churches in Nigeria especially the Pentecostal don’t have a capable music director. Most of the churches just appoint or elect the music director base on the fact that the person could only play an instrument or sing, and this has been one of the reasons why church music in Nigeria are not effective. Therefore, churches should endeavour to send their music director to a music school in other to upgrade his knowledge on church music which will enable him have idea on different aspect of church music such as: Choir management, Conducting, Rudiments of Music, Composition, Performance, etc.

Many churches in Nigeria, due to the poor knowledge on church music look at the music wing as an aspect that is not so relevant to such attention required for. Some priest or pastor even says they can perform wonderful service even without choir or any other music wing. Therefore, below are some of the roles of Nigerian Churches in building an effective church music.

• Sponsor to Music Workshop / Seminar

Good a thing some churches have Music Director, I mean a very few church. It has also been observed that those churches that were able to have capable music director don’t encourage them to acquire more knowledge or share knowledge with their counterpart in the society by refusing to finically support them in other to attend some workshop or seminar as the case may be.

Churches are to be happy seeing their music director who is willing to attend music workshop or seminar within or outside their society because that is an avenue to gain more knowledge, share knowledge, intellectual upgrade, familiarize with other music scholars, etc. Therefore churches are encouraged to finance such event as it occurs.

• Provision of Good Musical Instrument

When it comes to music section in churches, many pastors or priest take precaution because to them music is “too” expensive. Some pastors and elders of some churches in Nigeria especially the orthodox,

always like to tell their choristers/ music director of the kind of music performed and type of musical instrument used and how it was well performed, but they forgot that those musical instrument that seems to be too expensive for them are what they saw and enjoyed then began to compare their home choir with the choir met outside. The question is, who did they want to go to and source the money to purchase the church musical instruments? Is it the music director or the chorister? Absolutely, no!

It is the duty of the church to get musical instrument for the church musical performances. But in a situation whereby the church may seem not buoyant enough to finance the buying of the musical instrument, then the music director and the pastor can look for prominent personality in the society for financial support.

When church get good musical instrument for the choir or music group, surely the performance improves drastically.

The Role of a Music Director in Nigerian Churches

It has been observed that Nigerian churches are not growing / effective due to inadequate knowledge of its management. The music director who is the key manager of the church music has to improve and equip himself in order to carry out his or her duties effectively. Many music director seems to have lost the insight of their role and even the church has also failed to equip, sanitized, appreciate the available ones, which has led to failure in church music. Below are some of the roles of music director in building an effective church music in Nigerian.

Teach Music and Music Appreciation

Music is defined as “the science or art of making pleasing, expressive or intelligible combinations of tones; the making of such combination into compositions of definite structure and significance, and the art of inventing or rendering such compositions.

Teaching means instructing or guiding learning experiences which result in the development of skills, the acquisition of understanding, the shaping of attitudes, the development appreciation, and forming of correct habits.

Evelin [1], explained “it is the duty of music director to plan educational activities for the congregation and through rehearsals of choir, ensembles, individuals, and instrumental groups, provide an avenue for meeting the various need. Appreciation and understanding are gained through musical presentation, concerts, and other special music programmes.

Teaching music, then, helps persons develop musical understanding, skill, and appreciation which lead to greater participation in worship, evangelism, and education through the church.

It is the duty of the music director to teach the choir, from the children ministry/ section to the adult choir. Teaching music to the children helps to foster self-expression and assist building the adult choir because when the adult aren't there, the younger ones take place and to avoid lapses that could be created by any absent adult choir, the younger once which have been trained fit in. This help in continuity or choir performance. It is expected of the music director to

Train Persons to Lead, Sing and Play Music

Training person to lead, sing and play music means to guide them in the development of mental and motor skills necessary to become adept in the act and art of leading, singing, and playing music. Music training is concerned with developing skills in order that persons may function acceptably in the Music Ministry of the church.

Skill training, training for specific music positions such as song leader, organist, or drummer, and training in the use of leadership methods and materials are necessary. In order for adequate training to be achieved, the choral groups, instrumentalist and those taking part in skill development opportunities should meet on a regular basis, preferably weekly. Some churches are able to provide on-going music training opportunities for their members; other may need to provide short – term training through a music workshop or special courses at other locations.

• Encourage Persons to Participate in Music Activities

Many church members fail to receive the blessings available through participation in music activities. The contributing factors may be

- **Inability to read**
- Poor music leadership and musicians
- Inadequate supply of hymnals and other music resources; and
- Limited knowledge of the hymns and hymnody.

It is encouraging to note that more children and youth got to school, at least through primary grades, and learn reading and writing in their indigenous and national languages. Time will cure the first factor. But there are still countless adult unable to read. Every church with this problem should organize adult literacy classes to help their members more fully participate in reading the Bible and singing the hymn of the Christian faith.

Church music leader who have little or no training may contribute to half-hearted congregational singing and mediocre choral performances.

Many church members do not own their own copy of a hymnal. Some churches provide these in the pews. When members are not able to secure their own hymnal, the church should have these available for sale, or, at least, for regular use. Choir often find it difficult to locate good music resources, and some of the choral music because of lack of music training.

Provide Music for Services and Organizations of the Church

Music director provide music for different church services and organization. He prepares the service with suitable hymns and choral work for the specific occasion as the case may be. Apart from preparing the hymn for every Sunday service, other services include; church wedding service, funeral service, birthday services child dedication, etc.

For music director in orthodox churches, it is expected that he get himself familiar with church season in other to prepare the choir effectively in performing musical work specifically for a particular season, such as: Advent, Lent, Ascension, Trinity, Easter, etc.

Impact of the Music Director on the Congregation

As the music director is responsible for the choir's performance, likewise he is to the congregation. He enhances the life of congregation through music, perhaps through congregational hymn. The only aspect congregation don't partake in singing is during the choir anthem but all other aspect of worship/ singing; the congregation are free and allowed to participate.

He allows the congregation to sing alongside with the choir thereby made them to feel the beauty of many voice singing, thereby, enjoy and partake in the blessing of singing unto the Lord.

Also, he makes them to sing to key which makes a good singer and also makes them to sing comfortably without stressing their voices, and for those who sing in parts, makes their voices balance.

He makes the congregation to be discipline while singing; he exposed them to the techniques of singing along with the accompaniment, breath control, observing dynamics etc.

Finally, he teach them to learn about hymn by presenting a clear understanding of what hymn is saying to the singers or listener, ministers or lay persons

Best Practices of church Music Director

The work of the music director in building an effective church music cannot be over emphasizing. The music director is expected to keep the choir fit in

for every church programme, therefore, the choir needed get stick to their commitment. Though it has been observed that many choir in Nigeria are not committed as they should, rather they made themselves known as occasional choir because it only when occasion comes that the church gives the choir total support probably because some special guest are expected to be in such occasion. But soon after such occasion the support from the church drop and everyone goes back to square one. Below are suggested best practices for music director in building an effective choir, as an instrument for effective church music.

Establishment a Consistent time and style of rehearsal

Before rehearsal time is been decided, the music director need to do some research to find out when most of those who might be interested in singing can attend and when the rehearsal venue can be available. Once the best time is determined, stick to it. For example, if it is Sunday afternoon, stick to it. Perhaps you may lose some members at first, but in the long run both the music and the music director will benefit from the regular time of the rehearsal. Effectiveness of the church music and choir is not basically on performance, but also by the content and value of rehearsals.

Selecting Repertoire with Care

Selecting music is in many ways the most creative and rewarding part of leading a choir. It is also among the most challenging. It's important to know the abilities of your choir and to test and expand those abilities with a range of repertoire. Overloading choir with too much difficult music can be just as demoralizing as singing the simplest hymn arrangement week after week. In a choir of very few men, as common in Nigeria, music director need not to be afraid to use the vast repertoire available in S-A-B format.

Expect a Great Deal from your Choir

To make a choir effective means to make an effective church music, therefore, it is expected that the choir needed to be challenged. Music director need to challenge the choir through both selected repertoire and the role design for them during performance.

Recognize that Choir Members are Volunteers

Service as a choir member involves a major time commitment, therefore, the music director needed to offer the choir as much encouragement as possible. Music director also need to pass on meaningful comments made by members of the congregation, thereby letting the choir know that they are having positive impact on the congregation's spiritual life. Also applause from congregation or compliments from the pulpit reinforce the effort of the choir.

Offer Choir Members Time Off

Because so many people are already too busy in today's society, the "seasonal choir" approach with Sunday morning rehearsals may be the only way some congregation can keep a choir going.

In a functional choir, it is expected that there should be a month or two months' Time off. During this period such choir can meet early on Sunday morning to choose the simple tune for the service. Offering choir member time off helps in keeping them fit and stress off.

Music Director Needed To Be Prepared

Any music director that demand more of his choir members, demand more of himself. The music director needs to prepare for the unseen circumstances. He needs to have several easy anthems in the folder in reserve so that even with the reduced numbers, the choir can still perform excellently

Set High Standard

Music director needs to do all he can to see the choir consistently sing its best possible level. If music director relax, everyone else relax too, and the choir's sense of accomplishment and contribution will suffer. If possible all ill-prepared anthems are to be postponed. If need arise, switch from three-part anthems to two-part. The choir will come to appreciate consistent standards for quality performance.

CONCLUSION

It will be generally agreed that any growing church in Nigeria and even in the whole world, has her music unit effective, because no church grows without music. Also, the standard of the church music unit (choir) shows the standard of the church and a church without music is as good as a dead church. Therefore, the music director has a lot of work to do in other to achieve and attain a greater high in the ministry. The pastors, the elders, church council and the entire member of the church needs to give total support to the music director in other to help him to work effectively in building the church music. The work should not be left for the music director alone because one man cannot single handedly make music rather he is just the Director or simply a coordinator.

RECOMMENDATION

Churches should stop making the post of music director an elective but by appointment because by election wrong person could be elect and also the church committee should research and interview any qualified person before he or she is finally appointed.

The church should be ready to sponsor the music director to both international and local music seminar and workshop in order to update his performance.

Also, church should provide required musical instrument requested for musical production. And finally the church should approve all that is requested to start training the younger once from Sunday school or children ministry in other to have continuity when the elderly once aren't there.

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